

**PLAN FOR A COMMUNITY
EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION
CAMPAIGN**

**ZLATOGRAD SOLID
WASTE PROJECT**

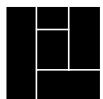
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ABSTRACT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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PLAN FOR A COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION CAMPAIGN

INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Bulgaria Local Government Initiative (LGI) has been assisting the municipality of Zlatograd improve its solid waste management system. Prior assistance provided by the LGI has helped the municipality

- Develop and restructure the municipal solid waste department for increased effectiveness;¹
- Analyze the cost structure of the service, and implement administrative and personnel changes to simplify and streamline operations;
 - a. design the most cost effective placement of waste receptacles and collection routes;
 - b. identify the municipal land fill as a potential environmental hazard² and expedite closure plans;
 - c. secure a 21 million leva mixed grant and loan from a special fund of the Ministry of Environment for the purchase of solid waste equipment, and the design and construction of a new land fill.³

Combining the financial assistance of the Ministry of Environment and technical assistance of the LGI, the municipality of Zlatograd can become a comprehensive model of effective solid waste management in a small Bulgarian community.

2. REQUEST FOR SERVICES OBJECTIVES

The Urban Institute's Request for Service (RFS) 203 has provided Zlatograd with US and Bulgarian consultants to conduct an engineering evaluation of the current and future landfills and perform other analyses of the current and future municipal landfills to expedite the utilization of the 21 million BGL loan from the GOB. The RFS represents the completion of Task 1 of Phase I of the LGI Zlatograd Work Plan.

The first deliverable under task four of RFS 203 is a public participation plan for the municipality. The plan should outline methods whereby the municipality can inform citizens of the past, present and future municipal initiatives in the area of solid waste management, solicit citizen input on the effectiveness and

¹ Solid waste management services were provided by a municipal company until 1993 when the firm was fired for inadequate service. The LGI has been instrumental in assisting the municipality to absorb the service into the municipal structure and improve the level of service being received by citizens, while controlling costs.

² Water and soil testing performed in 1996 indicates that groundwater pollution exists, but is minimal. The LGI has prepared a land fill closure plan that the municipality is implementing.

³ LGI reports were used as supporting documentation for the loan request and a LGI consultant assisted the municipal staff make cost estimates.

appropriateness of such efforts, and ultimately stimulate a sustainable process of citizen involvement in local government.

3. CURRENT STATUS

On November 30, 1996 Zlatograd experienced a devastating flash flood that caused more than 2 billion BGL worth of major infrastructure damage. The overall disruption to the community has forced the municipality to focus almost all resources and efforts towards flood recovery and reconstruction programs. The impact of the flood in concert with the recent economic downturn will make it a very difficult winter for all citizens of Zlatograd. Taking these developments into account, it is highly unlikely that the municipal administration will undertake an aggressive public participation campaign on solid waste management before the summer.

The mayor and his staff are inundated with problems that require immediate attention and resolution (e.g. schools and hospitals without heat, food, gas or medical supplies) In the current environment, it will be near impossible to get the required level and consistency of local commitment to make the program a success. There are political considerations as well. It is rumored that the mayor now finds himself in a ineffectual position with much of his political support base eroded. There has been outspoken public criticism of the administration's inability to mobilize the community to solve flood related problems, and many citizens are critical of the way that scarce resources are being used. A highly publicized solid waste public participation program at this time could be construed as "off the mark" and will not assist the mayor counter such charges. Therefore, local political will is weak.

However, the municipality is supportive of a public participation plan⁴ and this memorandum is the result of consultations with municipal staff and citizen groups. The work plan has not been given exact dates, as at this time it is not clear when local conditions will be conducive to implementation.⁵ Nevertheless, when the situation in Zlatograd normalizes, the municipality will have a blueprint for a successful effort to involve and inform citizens of the local administration's ambition to provide improved solid waste services.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

4.1 Focus & Strategy

The public participation plan developed for the Zlatograd municipality focuses on two primary areas of activity. They are:

⁴ Municipal staff are familiar with western local government public participation methods. Mayor Despotov has participated in a US study tour, municipal staff have attended the USAID(ISC) - MOE national solid waste policy conference with a special focus on citizen participation issues, and previous LGI reports have detailed US cities' experiences.

⁵ See project timeline, Annex A.



1) COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

2) COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community Organization

Objective: The creation of sustainable community based organizations that will provide a voice for citizens to comment on local solid waste policy and implementation.

The municipality of Zlatograd is small and despite several active non-governmental organizations, local politics and community relations are practiced in a very personal and informal manner. These are important factors to take into account when designing a local government public participation plan. In Zlatograd, if an individual has a particular complaint or gripe concerning municipal government, he or she will go directly to the mayor's office and wait for an individual meeting. The local administration practices this open door policy and will not likely change in the future. This factor creates obstacles to sustained "organized" methods of public involvement. The obstacles are created because a large majority of citizens visiting city hall are representing individual interests and not the interests of citizen groups or organizations. As long as citizens are able to receive such service, i.e. are able to receive high level municipal attention to issues that affect them and them alone, the incentive for group organization will be reduced. This is not necessarily a bad thing for local government, but needs to be considered by the Zlatograd municipality and other municipalities of a similar size when implementing such programs.

The municipality must also be realistic in its expectations. Resistance to collective action is very real in all Bulgarian communities, a reaction to the years of communism. Moreover, the tough economic times have forced the tight knit community to turn inward - families are using all available time and resources to support children, parents or relatives. Nevertheless, a circle of concerned citizens could swell into an active community based organization.

Community Outreach

Objective: The organization of community events that educate and inform citizens of the municipal solid waste management efforts, with a special emphasis on the younger population.

The efforts of the municipality to clean up the community and provide citizens with better services related to solid waste management are commendable. However the municipality is beginning to understand that gaining community recognition will not be easy. In a market based economy, municipal solid waste management invariably provides the local city manager with an unenviable proposition. Local governments are rarely complemented for improvements in solid waste related services but are severely criticized when problems do occur. The municipality should understand that not all of Zlatograd's citizens will react in a positive way to the achievements.

In a demographic sense, older citizens of Zlatograd and those involved in rural farming activities will generally not be active. Many of the older citizens do not place a value on or associate costs with municipal services. The attitude as it relates to solid waste issues can be characterized as follows: *“government services are and should be free.”* There is no appreciation for the changing times and changing roles of local authorities. It is also understandable that the participation of rural inhabitants of Zlatograd will be minimal, as most representatives of this group are isolated and do not interact on a daily basis with local government services. However, the younger population of Zlatograd are the most open to new ideas and practices of community responsibility and are the easiest access point to family units. The strategy of the public participation plan should be to tailor public involvement activities to the youth of Zlatograd and exploit tight family structures to educate and spread the understanding to other Zlatograd citizens.

4.2 Promoting Community Level Organization

The second deliverable under task four of request for service (RFS) 203 is a town meeting, to be held in Zlatograd by March 15th. It is not recommended that the municipality attempt to hold this town meeting until the summer. To support this recommendation, we can cite the recent municipal experience in organizing a town meeting. In January 1997 the municipality called a town meeting in City Hall with the aim of informing the general public about flood relief and recovery programs. To inform citizens of the meeting and attract attendance, the municipality orchestrated a media blitz using local television, radio and newspapers. The municipality expected a full house, as one of the announcements during the meeting would be the municipal compensation packages for the families seriously impacted by the flood. Unfortunately, the meeting only attracted about 50 people.

In the current climate, an aggressive municipal attempt to hold a town meeting on solid waste will most likely result in an unsatisfactory result. However, there is a less ambitious but more targeted strategy that can bring citizen opinion into city hall in a cooperative and productive manner.

Task 1: Creation of a strategic citizens' committee

Timing: Month 1 - 3

The Zlatograd municipality should stimulate the formation of a citizen's committee that will serve as the direct link between the local administration and individual citizens. The committee will not be randomly selected, but members will be selected or approached for involvement. The strategy for committee development is to include members that have informal, micro-networks within the community. Examples of appropriate members would be building managers, teachers, hospital or school administrators, officers of local NGOs, and student leaders. The work of the committee will be disseminated formally, via municipal channels, the CDC, schools and press et. al., but will also be distributed through these informal but, due to the community size, very effective means. At a minimum, the committee should

perform a review of the municipal solid waste program -- including LGI consultant reports and recommendations;



- “ Visit the current land fill and observe the solid waste department’s operations and procedures;
Review the recommended list of public participation activities described in this report;
Prepare a work plan outlining the intended work of the committee, prioritizing public participation activities and identifying “citizen recommendations” for future municipal solid waste activities.
Present the work plan to the municipal council, the mayor, the local media, and to citizens at a town meeting.

Task II: Conduct a town meeting

Timing: Month 4, Month 7

A town meeting should be held when all the task defined under Task I are completed, and the meeting should be jointly chaired by the committee and local government officials. The purposes of the town meeting are:

- (a) to allow the committee to introduce the work plan to the general public and press,
- (b) to exhibit the public/private cooperative nature of the municipality’s solid waste management services, and
- (c) to allow the municipality the opportunity to inform the public of the land fill problem and its plans for resolution of the problem.

To reinforce the partnership aspect of the meeting, independent experts and NGO representatives should be invited to share the floor. The LGI solid waste engineering consultant and other members of the land fill team should provide independent assessments of the dangers related to the current land fill, and merits of the new land fill site. These types of actions will reinforce public trust in the municipality and its solid waste decision making processes.

The town meeting should also be the kick-off event of the community outreach programs. As the outreach programs will be focused on the youth of the community, the meeting should include the following components.

appropriate presentation and a strong focus on issues that will be well perceived by younger citizens of Zlatograd, i.e. environmental aspects of effective solid waste management.

attendance by a cross section of school children

inclusion of events that are directly relate to young people; provide the stage to the 40 students involved in the Community Development Center (CDC) environmental awareness project or make an awards presentation to a conscientious student.

a brief performance or skit by a youth folk dance or theater group.
the official public announcement of the community outreach campaign.

4.3 Community Outreach Campaign

Community outreach is the most important component of the public participation plan. To increase the degree to which citizens will retain the information dispersed, all events and activities should be presented as components of a unified campaign. The campaign should have a defined beginning and end, and to the greatest degree possible identify concrete results that are expected to be achieved. The municipality and the citizen's committee should jointly approve a campaign concept paper, that identifies to the greatest extent possible the objectives and concrete results expected. As a general rule, in Zlatograd during 1997 it will be difficult to stimulate and maintain public awareness of a single issue over an extended period of time. At this stage, the goal of the municipality and the committee will look to stimulate citizen action and involvement for a relatively short period of time, between three to five months. The opening event of the campaign will be a competition for the naming of the campaign.

Task I: Campaign Promotion & Marketing

Timing: Month 4 - 7

Sub-task IA: Name the Campaign Competition

The municipality and the committee, with the support of the Community Development Center (CDC), should organize a competition between the two local schools for selecting a name for the campaign. The competitions can be organized on the class level, with each class proposing a campaign slogan and designing a campaign logo. The winning class should be rewarded with a prize i.e. a trip or a dinner. The community center can be very valuable in contacting business clients and obtaining sponsorships.

Once selected, the slogan and logo will be used during all follow-on events. It is recommended that large signs be placed on major roads going in and out of Zlatograd, and remain there during the length of the campaign. This will contribute to community pride and responsibility, and act as a constant reminder.

Sub-task IB: Video Competition

A video clip competition will be a very effective way to spread the message of the campaign. In a relatively isolated community such as Zlatograd, there are by no means a plethora of evening time leisure activities. Most families stay at home or visit neighbors during the evenings, especially true as a result of the economic depression, and a large majority of these watch the local cable television channel. The municipality has the authority to reserve air time free of charge and can provide this time for airing a campaign video.

Sub-task IC: *Posters, Stickers & Other Promotional Materials*

The Community Development Center has developed a strong relationship with a Smolyan printing house and can print quality color posters and stickers at a reasonable price. The posters should have the campaign logo and slogan on it, and can deliver public information messages that coincide with activities.

Task II: Pilot Recycling Activity

Timing: Month 4 - 6

The practice of recycling is very well integrated into the ways of the average Zlatograd family. The reason for this is not an overwhelming appreciation for the environment, but rather is born out of economic necessity. As a generalization, glass and paper are rarely thrown out, while plastic and other food packaging products are not used in significant quantities.⁶ However, the mayor and the municipal administration would like to do a pilot effort in waste separation in a Zlatograd neighborhood. The mayor believes that a recycling program dealing with paper products could be economically viable. There is a paper waste collection depot in Assenovgrad, about 120 km from Zlatograd, and the mayor believes that a monthly haul could generate enough revenue to cover related municipal costs. The CDC is currently performing a financial feasibility study of the program. If the study shows that the program could be financially self-sustaining over the mid to long term, a donor could be found to provide waste separation bags and provide other supplies over the short term to get the program off the ground. The municipality has agreed to wait for the results of the CDC analysis before proceeding. The task should include the following components.

The recycling effort and all related literature should reinforce sound financial principles. The focus should not be on environmental issues or service alone - but emphasize the fact that this particular service is self-financing and also a benefit to the community.

The selection of the pilot area should take into account the representative nature of the pilot area. If the pilot area is not representative, financial projections and planning for a city wide project will be difficult.

Conduct a targeted town meeting to introduce the program to citizens living in the pilot area and educate citizens on general waste issues. The town meeting can be mirrored by a students meeting in the local school attended by children from the pilot area.

The recycling effort will need promotion and marketing in the early stages - particularly to educate people about the benefits of waste separation and to reinforce the issues of community service. The CDC can support the printing and distribution of program posters and flyers.

⁶ See Deliverable A of Task 2 of RFS 203, the "Solid Waster Stream Analysis" for typical waste composition and generation data for Zlatograd.

The program anticipates the provision of plastic bags to participating households. It should be clear that the bags provided are to be returned to the municipality after the pilot effort is complete. Similar experiences under the Ministry of Environment/USAID solid waste policy project showed that bags will be sold or used for other purposes if they are simply handed out on good faith.

The program requires a tracking system that weighs the total volume of waste collected, again to assist the municipality determine if the program can be expanded city-wide.

Task III: Municipal Composting Pile

Timing: Month 6 to Month 8 (however, must take place during summer months)

Despite the rural nature of Zlatograd, there is a significant amount of organic waste that is deposited in the land fill.⁷ This waste contributes to the constant burning at the land fill, and adds unnecessary volume. Composting heaps can be an effective and environmentally compatible alternative to land filling.

The municipality should sponsor a municipal composting heap during the summer months and the resulting fertilizer could be used by the solid waste department on municipal parks and gardens. The selection of the composting site should be done via an open and transparent process. A composting pile will only work during the summer months, and during these months the pile will attract animals and insects and emanate a rotting smell. If the preferred site is situated close to inhabited areas, approval from the citizens who live closest should be obtained by the municipality. A percentage of the fertilizer could also be given to the citizens in close proximity of the site or provided to the neighborhood competition teams (Task IV) to help beautify common area. Peace Corps environmental volunteers in Stara Zagora and Kurdjali have worked on citizen education campaigns related to composting. These information materials could be imported at minimal cost.

Task IV: Neighborhood or Block Cleanliness Competitions

Timing: Month 4 to 5

Competition and community recognition of the winners will be one of the most effective ways to involve young citizens of Zlatograd in a solid waste related project. Once involved in a competition, the young participants will begin to absorb some of the larger lessons of community responsibility and pride. Neighborhood or block cleanliness competitions can be a very practical way to involve these younger citizens.

⁷ Results of the Solid Waste Stream Analysis show that the current levels of organic waste generation are smaller than anticipated. This is due to the existing economic pressures. Therefore, a composting pile may be a more appropriate action further in the future.

The municipality and school authorities should issue a challenge to two apartments blocks and introduce the students who live in the respective neighborhoods to the entire school body. Therefore, the students involved will feel a sense of responsibility and perhaps more importantly, pressure. It would be a good publicity stunt to have the workers in the municipal solid waste department select the winning block. They after all are the real experts on community cleanliness and will be most familiar with the prevailing conditions prior to the clean up activity. A second option is to organize smaller teams, combining youth and solid waste workers. This would reinforce the overall message of community partnership in solving solid waste problems.

Task V: Speakers Bureau

Timing: Month 3 to 7 (every month)

The focus of the community outreach program is on the younger population of Zlatograd. Young people, as a general rule, are more impressionable than older people and a series of personable speakers on the subject of solid waste would be a very appropriate way to educate and inform. Because of the element of personal contact, which generally makes a deeper and more permanent impression than impersonal contact (via print media or radio address), effective speakers are a must in a successful campaign. The speakers can represent all aspects of community life (municipal officials, doctors, scientists, engineers, teachers et. al.) but must have a vital interest in solid waste and be knowledgeable about local conditions. Enthusiasm and strong presentation skills should also be stressed when selecting speakers. Suggested speakers include Eng. Emilia Kostakeva - LGI solid waste engineering consultant, the director of the forestry service, an environmental Peace Corps volunteer and Nelly Ilieva, Public Relations Officer at the Ministry of Environment.

5. CONCLUSION

The preceding design for a public education and participation campaign should act as a guide to the municipality in undertaking community involvement activities related to solid waste management. The municipality has implemented many positive changes related to improved solid waste management over the last several years. However the municipality has not received enough positive public relations from these changes. Furthermore, the municipality will need to further educate the public about solid waste issues, and account for public opinion in the solid waste decision making process if the benefit to the community is to be lasting.

Unfortunately Zlatograd has received more than its share of problems and the recent natural disaster further complicates the work facing the municipal staff. An informal review of the condition of the waste receptacles in April indicated that @70% of the smaller bins were damaged or destroyed, while @25% of the larger containers are no longer fit for use. The municipal solid waste specialist noted that the public will to pay garbage fees, while traditionally high, has dropped significantly as service has dropped. As an example, some citizens are now refusing to pay their fees because they no longer have individual bins and the closest bin is now over 100 meters from their homes. These local conditions, as they persist, will make it difficult for the municipality to continue to implement a successful program in this area.

However, the municipality has its advantages. Municipal staff are knowledgeable and want to outreach to citizens on this and other issues. Municipal leadership has the benefit of other Bulgarian cities' experiences, and have indicated strong support for public involvement initiatives. The municipality also has the 21 million BGL mixed grant and loan, the CDC to advise and assist it, and the attention of the entire nation ever since the November flood. The two aspects of this plan, organization and outreach, will both need to be achieved if there is to be long term impact. At this stage in the development of Bulgaria and Zlatograd, it is optimistic to expect the community to overflow with optimism and volunteerism. However, if the municipality attempts the above mentioned targeted activities, it will lay the groundwork for what will one day be a concerned and involved community in municipal governance.